

**Remarks at Closing of Macedonian Young Lawyers' Association
Julia Taft Refugee Fund Project for Documenting Refugees
October 4, 2012**

Good morning. It is my great pleasure to be here with you this morning. I want to especially thank Jasmina Brezovska, President of the Young Lawyers Association for inviting me here, and for the outstanding work that she and her colleagues do every day on behalf of some of this country's most at-risk communities.

Since 2010, the Macedonian Youth Lawyers' Association (MYLA) has provided legal aid and representation to asylum seekers, refugees, and other individuals of concern who the United Nations High Commission on Refugees has identified as being at-risk of statelessness.

Last year, the U.S. Embassy was pleased to provide the MYLA with a grant of just under \$22,000 in support of their work through the Julia Taft Refugee Fund. This important fund was set up by the Department of State in 2000 under the leadership of former Assistant Secretary Julia Taft, to respond to the critical needs of refugees around the world. Last year, projects like this one were funded in 34 different countries in Africa, Asia, Europe and the Americas.

Since then MYLA has helped at-risk individuals to obtain important documentation they need to regulate their legal status in Macedonia. Most of the refugees with whom they work are Roma who fled to Macedonia from Kosovo during the 1999 conflict who were unable to afford the fees needed for those documents, or the costs associated with proper legal representation and assistance.

But perhaps the most vulnerable group among those they have helped has been the children whose births were never recorded in the Birth registry records here in Macedonia. MYLA has been able to work with the Ministry for Labor and Social Policy in registering these children. And since September 1, 2011 and September 30, 2012, our grant and their hard work have resulted in the issuance of 1281 documents for 804 people.

Sometimes, when we talk about numbers or categories of individuals who are helped, it is easy to forget the person or the family behind the numbers and the category. It is important to remember that each number is a mother, or father, or daughter or son that can now integrate better into the broader community, and access the rights to which they are entitled.

It is often said that a society is judged by how it treats its most vulnerable members, and there are very few more vulnerable than a child who is an undocumented refugee. MYLA has set an outstanding example in caring for some of Macedonia's very most vulnerable members, and their work is something every citizen of this country can be proud of. We at the U.S. Embassy are proud to have supported them and congratulate them for their excellent work.

Thank you.